

Stakeholder engagement in an online community education project via diverse media engagements

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Effective stakeholder engagement is vital for the success of community education projects to secure funding from philanthropic organisations or government bodies, and is often used as a measure of success in reports. Online services such as websites, digital media engagement, and social media platforms can be utilised to engage with stakeholders who are geographically dispersed. This discussion is framed by key components of stakeholder engagement and how they contribute to successful projects concerning the stakeholder-based project management model. The discussion uses these tools to view how an exemplar online community education research project engaged with stakeholders, applying dialogic communications theory as a lens. The benefits and challenges of these services are discussed and situated within the literature.

Introduction

Modern communications technology has delivered effective tools for researchers to connect with both project participants and stakeholders. These tools, however, are only as effective as their planned and strategic use (Sutherland, Alis & Khuttab, 2020). This paper investigates the challenges and benefits of stakeholder engagement through an examination of stakeholder engagement frameworks and communications theory. In doing so, it will demonstrate how strategic stakeholder engagement works to benefit researchers and research projects by increasing opportunities for funding and success through the analysis of an online community education research project. This project aimed to develop educational resources and digital programs for parents and early childhood educators who support children from Australian military families.

Traditionally used by the public relations and business disciplines, stakeholder engagement processes provide useful frameworks for enhancing outputs and definitions of success for research and community education projects. This paper applies the stakeholder engagement framework proposed by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) (2007) to outline and define stakeholders as users, influencers and providers. Stakeholder engagement is strongly correlated with community engagement, which works to build trust through open and transparent dialogic communication.

This paper also uses the five key components of stakeholder engagement as defined by the IFC (2007), namely stakeholder identification, analysis and engagement, information disclosure, reporting, and consultation. These components demonstrate how social media and web platforms were used to identify and analyse stakeholder engagement via the

collection of digital analytics, hashtags, and capitalising on research social networks. In keeping with analysis and application of the stakeholder engagement framework, the paper outlines how the project used digital communication to inform, report to, and consult with the wide range of stakeholders, using dialogic communications theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998) as a lens. Additionally, the benefits and challenges of stakeholder engagement in research and community education projects are considered. The time-intensive nature of maintaining digital communication platforms was a significant factor for the project; however, it was outweighed by benefits associated with engagement, including opportunities for additional funding, future projects, and high levels of encouragement and motivation in the project team.

Significance

The findings explored in this case study are timely, as funding for education programs and projects becomes increasingly competitive, and there is a stronger emphasis on engagement with stakeholders. The lessons learned in this case study are relevant for other education research projects that can be strengthened through effective stakeholder engagement, and how this can impact the project's budget and the project team's time.

Definitions and types of stakeholder engagement

The role of the stakeholder is integral to the success of projects where their efforts to work towards a shared goal are either individual or collective. The IFC (2007) defined the term "stakeholder engagement" as

a means of describing a broader, more inclusive, and continuous process between a company and those potentially impacted that encompasses a range of activities and approaches, and spans the entire life of a project. (p.12)

When exploring stakeholder engagement, the terms 'community' and 'engagement' are often linked. 'Community' is a broad term used to define groups of people, such as stakeholders, interest or citizen groups in a community of place (geographic location); a community of practice (community of similar interest); or a community of affiliation or identity such as industry or sporting clubs (Millington, 2010). 'Engagement' encompasses a framework of guiding principles, strategies, and approaches based on principles that respect the right of all community members to be informed, consulted, involved and empowered. Community engagement, therefore, could be understood as,

the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioural changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices (Center for Disease Control, 1997, para. 9).

Depending on the project, there are typically four different types of stakeholders: users, governance, influencers, and providers (DAESE, 2020).

(i) Users as stakeholders

Project users are the target individuals who will benefit from the outcomes of a project or program.

(ii) Governance as stakeholders

These are individuals or groups of individuals, for example, steering committees, who have a direct interest in project management. Membership typically includes auditors, regulatory organisations, health and safety executives.

(iii) Influencers as stakeholders

Influencers are individuals who are capable of influencing decisions and changing the direction of the project or program, for example, unions or lobby groups.

(iv) Providers as stakeholders

These providers may cover a larger number of profiles including business partners, contractors, and anyone else who provides resources to the project or program.

Any sort of community engagement must encompass strategies and processes that are sensitive to the community context in which it occurs. According to Millington (2010), there are typically five different types of communities that are defined by the purpose that brings them together.

1. *Interest* - communities of people who share the same interest or passion;
2. *Action* - communities of people trying to bring about change;
3. *Place* - communities of people brought together by geographic boundaries;
4. *Practice* - communities of people in the same profession or undertaking the same activities; and,
5. *Circumstance* - communities of people brought together by external events or situations.

Effective community engagement employs a range of tools and strategies with a focus on fostering and enhancing trust as a critical element in long-term, sustainable engagement and effective governance to ensure success. Community engagement is a strategic process to work with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest, or affiliation to identify and address issues affecting the well-being of all those involved.

Theory

The theoretical framework of community engagement

At the commencement of a project, building trust and fostering open and transparent communication is key to developing an environment where stakeholders have the opportunity to meaningfully engage in the project activities. To assist researchers in the engagement process, various frameworks are developed. Common principles of engagement that are shared by the exemplar project team outlined later in this paper are informed by the main components of stakeholder engagement listed by the IFC (2007), detailed in Figure 1.

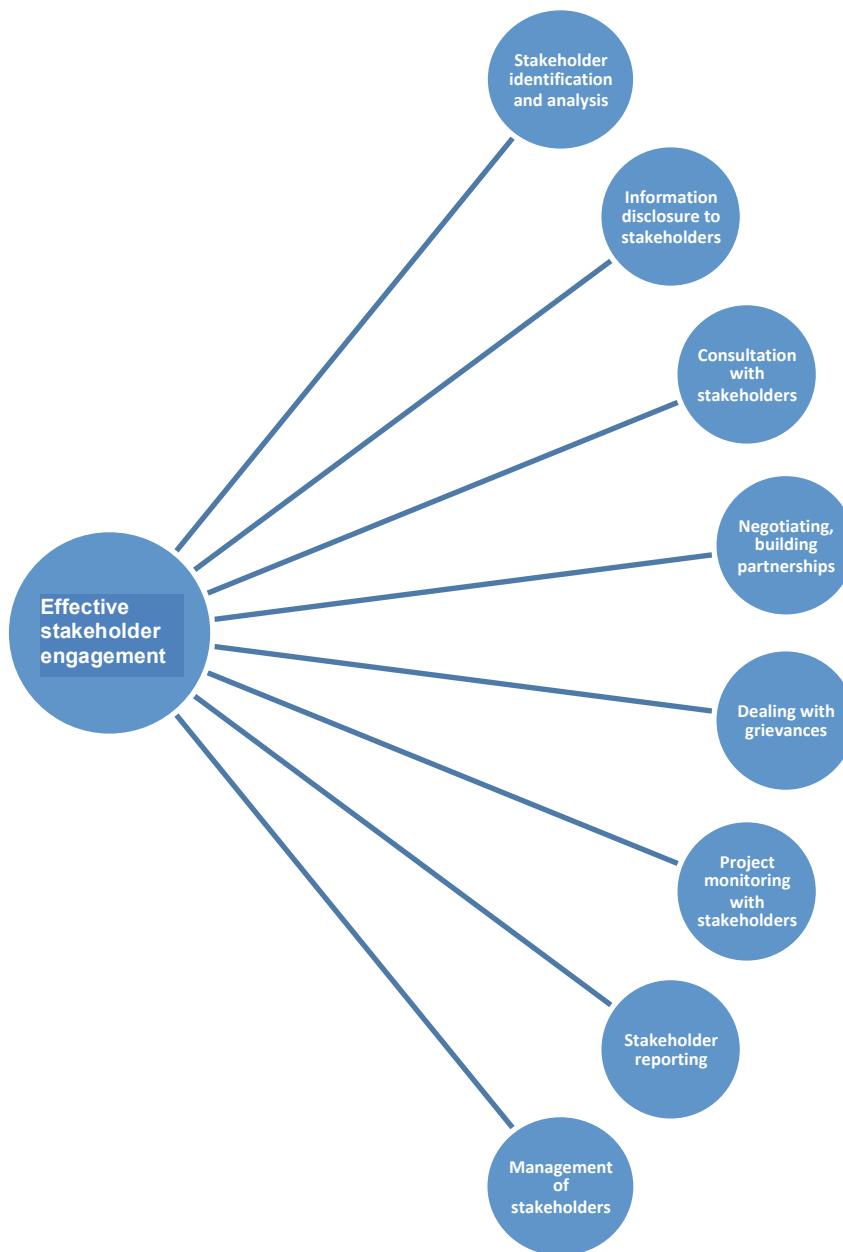


Figure 1: Main components of stakeholder engagement (adapted from ICF, 2007)

While the components of engagement overlay all project activities to promote engagement, the Association for Project Management (2020) provided researchers working in any research context with a simple, five-component framework of engagement. These are:

1. communication;
2. early and frequent consultation;
3. recognising stakeholder's limitations
4. developing a plan for engagement; and
5. developing strong relationships.

The five components speak true to any working relationship or partnership. At any level, it is not possible to develop a meaningful research partnership without transparent communication, consultation, planning, acknowledgement of individual strengths, and input into enhancing the relationship. Additionally, Rajablu, Marthandan and Wan Yusoff (2015) provided researchers with a framework that assists in identifying the influencing independent variables that stakeholders bring to the project (p. 2). Each of these variables has the potential to positively inform the research team and result in project outcomes that are grounded within the stakeholders' needs and context. This is summarised in Figure 2.

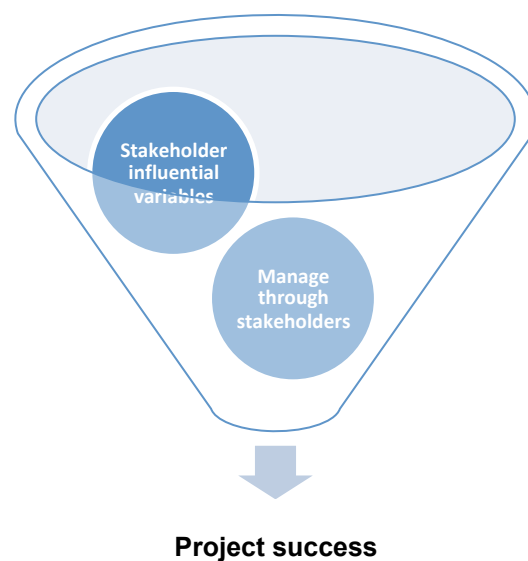


Figure 2: Stakeholder conceptual framework
(adapted from Rajablu et al., 2015)

Rajablu et al. (2015) listed the stakeholder influential variables as 'power, interest, urgency, legitimacy, proximity and network' (p. 112). They listed the ways to manage stakeholders are through 'identification, communication, engagement, empowerment and risk control' (p. 112).

In the current research environment, the success of projects is often measured by the level of engagement with relevant stakeholders (International Finance Cooperation, 2007; Rajablu et al., 2015). The strength of the relationships formed is determined by the level of importance the research team places on fostering an environment that is conducive to

stakeholder involvement, interaction, and communication. This environment needs to be considered in the very early stages of the project process, and then continue to overlay the project until its completion. The principles and strategies used, following acceptance of stakeholder variables, evolve and change as the project unfolds. The cycles of feedback through communication with stakeholders has the potential to produce a dynamic research environment where stakeholders are empowered to inform and shape the outcomes of the project.

Dialogic communications theory

Dialogic communications theory is a strategic framework developed by Kent and Taylor (1998) to analyse and justify the use of Internet technology to build stakeholder relationships. The theory uses and extends two-way communication theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), with two-way communications being the preferred model for communicating with stakeholders. The Internet and social media platforms are very effective at facilitating dialogic, two-way communications. Platform affordances provide opportunities for direct communication, input, feedback and even disagreement. Dialogic theory is used by public relations scholars to enhance strategic communication with stakeholders (Linjuan, Wan-Hsiu, Zifei & Yi, 2018) and has been used to analyse a wide range of communications activities across government, industry and corporate spaces. Dialogic theory is also a useful tool for analysing and planning stakeholder engagement activities relating to research projects, as this current project demonstrates.

Research context

Previous research conducted by members of the project team revealed a lack of age and culturally appropriate programs and resources to support very young children in Australian Defence Force (ADF) families (Rogers, 2020b). During the initial study, early childhood educators and parents requested early childhood programs, digital resources and physical resources (Rogers, Bird & Sims, 2019). To address this gap, the Early Childhood Defence Program (ECDP) was created, a three-year project led by a research team from two universities, the University of New England and Central Queensland University.

Military families are often described as stoic (Siebler & Goddard, 2014), however, the lack of programs and resources meant parents felt isolated and unsupported in their efforts to support the children to understand and cope with the many military family stressors as described by Andres and Coulthard (2015). Such stressors include deployment cycles where parents' deployments requiring them to work away for lengthy periods, training episodes based away from the home, and relocations that typically occur every two years for many families (Rogers, 2019). Families experience additional stressors when a parent loses their life in service or returns home with service-related injuries, medical conditions and/ or mental health conditions (Rogers, 2017). The transitions within military families during deployment cycles often create unique stressors for all family members (DeVoe & Ross, 2012), most especially during reintegration after the family reunite (Tomforde, 2015).

To support these families' needs, funding was gained from The Ian Potter Foundation (IPF) and the University of New England (UNE), to create two free, research-based online programs to support parents and educators in their efforts to assist young children from ADF families. To ensure the programs and resources are effective, parents and educators will pilot and evaluate them using control trials (Rogers, 2020a). Ethics approval for initial stakeholder engagement and the control trials was gained through the University of New England Human Research Ethics Committee. The stakeholders in this project include military families, early childhood educators, school teachers, family workers, government bodies, charities, policy makers, researchers and the funding bodies.

Research questions for discussion

There are four main research questions:

1. How has the ECDP project engaged in stakeholder engagement in the initial stages of the project using media engagement, the project website and social media?
2. How do these strategies fit with current theories and the literature?
3. How effective have these measures been, and what have been the benefits and challenges?
4. What can be learned from these lessons for future work within this project and other projects, and how might this inform other researchers?

To answer these questions, the team discussed and analysed ways in which they have utilised media engagement, the project website and social media to engage with stakeholders. The team then matched these methods of engagement with the theory related to stakeholder engagement and dialogic communication to enhance their discussions and analysis. Benefits and challenges were identified and the team discussed how this might affect future work in this project and other projects. The team also discussed the relevance of these findings to other research projects for other researchers. The next sections explore relevant examples within the project and how this fits with stakeholder engagement theories.

Examples from the ECDP project

This paper examines three components of stakeholder engagement in the ECDP project: media engagement, the project website, and social media. While all components of effective stakeholder engagement proposed by the IFC (2007) (Figure 1) are important, this paper focuses on only some of those as shown in Figure 3.

Media engagement, the project website and social media

Stakeholder identification and analysis

At the beginning of the project, identifying key stakeholders was a priority. According to the ICF (2007), project organisers should “invest time identifying and prioritizing stakeholders and accessing their interests and concerns” (p. 12). Involving social media was recognised as an important tool in identifying project stakeholders, as well as tracking

their activities and interests. Firstly, the project team connected with the social media accounts of stakeholder organisations they were already aware of. This included the project funders, major industry bodies as well as special interest and advocacy groups. During these initial stages, many of these stakeholders 'liked', shared or engaged with the project's social media accounts in return, helping to increase awareness of the project.



Figure 3: Effective stakeholder engagement for the ECDP project for media engagement, the project website and social media (adapted from ICF, 2007)

Hashtags were another tool for determining stakeholders. After identifying key project stakeholders and following their social media accounts, attention was paid to the hashtags utilised by these stakeholders. Applying these hashtags to the project's social media responses not only assisted in disseminating information further but also in demonstrating the project's awareness and understanding of potential issues within the community to other stakeholders.

Social media such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* were also utilised to access the social networks some of the research team members had already connected within early childhood education, the Australian Defence Force, or both. The researchers were able to utilise these social networks following the *Strong and Weak Tie* theory (Granovetter, 1973). In this theory,

strong ties are characterized as deep affinity; for example, family, friends or colleagues. Weak ties, in contrast, might be acquaintances, or a stranger with a common cultural background... the strength of these ties can substantially affect interactions, outcomes and well-being (Harper, 2016, para. 3).

Social media scholars have claimed social media is particularly effective at increasing and maintaining weak tie networks (Brake, 2014). This is demonstrated here, as the project was able to receive a wider reach and have access to a broader range of information that may have been available otherwise.

Social media was a strong tool to enable conversations about the project, and for creating or maintaining relationships with key stakeholders. The success of these approaches was evident through social media analytics. The *Facebook* posts with the highest levels of overall engagement, where those which tagged stakeholders' organisations and had engagement from members of the research team, including 'likes' and shares.

Media engagement about the project, including articles, news reports, web posts, podcasts, and social media, were used to attract stakeholders, providing information about the project and how they could connect with the research team. After reading one of the project's initial media engagements (e.g. <https://thesector.com.au/2019/09/26/une-early-childhood-researcher-creates-resources-to-support-with-pain-of-deployment/>), some stakeholders contacted the research team asking how they could get involved with the project, two of which were UNE alumni and became active members within the Steering Committee. Other media engagements via forums at the end of the online articles have also been used to engage with stakeholders, to analyse their areas of concern and interests (e.g. <https://theconversation.com/how-to-support-children-whose-parent-works-away-for-long-periods-125641> and <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=5156>).

The ECDP website (see <https://ecdefenceprograms.com>) was designed using *WordPress* to be a central hub that links all areas of the project. The *WordPress* platform was chosen because it was low budget and easy to add content to existing pages. The project had limited funds and current funding was aimed towards developing and trialling the individual projects. Another feature of *WordPress*, was that it could seamlessly link with *Moodle*, the online learning platform where the programs and resources were housed. When the programs were released, participants registered via the ECDP website and were taken to where the programs sit within *Moodle*. The website was designed to engage stakeholders and showcase the achievements of the project, such as media engagements, development of resources, and publications. Members of the research team, steering committee, web and media team, specialist consultants, volunteers and program authors and contributors were all featured in the 'About us' section. The website houses the resources for the project, identified into parent, educator, researcher and policymaker resources. Currently, there are links to published eBooks, Key Word Sign resources and digital interactives. These were frequently updated to maintain interest and deliver up to date information about the project's progress.

Another section of the website invites community members to participate in designing the programs, so they appropriately respond to the needs of both parents and educators.

Links to the parent and educator *Qualtrics* online surveys invite participants to share their experiences and provide suggestions for the programs. The responses provided guidance to design the programs so they are responsive to what is needed and will also be used in publications and conference presentations about the project (for example, social media research to find stakeholder groups and linking to funders' social media pages - The IPF and UNE School of Education).

A graphic designer was engaged to create the project logo, as it needed to have visual appeal and be easily recognisable across many social media platforms. The animal logo (Figure 4) was chosen as it is an iconic Australian animal that tends to be overlooked, despite its' strength and perseverance, as children from defence families have been in Australia. The logo is used as the project brand and is included in all publications where possible.



Figure 4: Wombat logo for the project

Information disclosure

To effectively engage with stakeholders, the IFC (2007) suggests project organisers

communicate information to stakeholders early in the decision-making process, in ways that are meaningful and accessible, and continue this communication process throughout the life of the project. (p. 12)

To do this, media engagement has focused on communicating information about the project, especially when funding was first received, e.g.

<https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/key-enablers/4819-university-of-new-england-to-help-military-families-cope-with-deployment-stress>

Specific groups were targeted, such as military families (in the previous example), and early childhood educators, e.g.:

<https://thesector.com.au/2019/09/26/une-early-childhood-researcher-creates-resources-to-support-with-pain-of-deployment> and <https://thesector.com.au/2021/03/16/new-resources-aim-to-help-children-from-adf-families-understand-health-challenges/>.

Other media engagement has directly invited ideas for the programs and associated resources from stakeholders through linked surveys, e.g. https://www.une.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/333846/UNE-Newsletter-Volume-4-Issue-12.pdf pages 6-8, and <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=5156>). Some media engagements were more general but directed users to the site for the use of already existing resources (e.g. <https://theconversation.com/birthdays-holidays-christmas-without-mum-or-dad-how-to-support-kids-with-a-parent-away-fighting-fires-146317>).

Social media networks were also heavily utilised as an information disclosure method. Social media, particularly *Facebook*, was an effective method for communicating with military families because many families rely heavily on official and unofficial social media networks to gain information and support (Defence Community Organisation, 2020; Johnson, 2018). The ECDP *Facebook* page was created with a clear audience in mind, specifically targeting ADF families and early childhood educators. For example, *Facebook* posts were focused on key project elements such as research participation opportunities, and issues and topics relevant to these target audiences. Examples of other discussed posts that received strong engagement responses included calendar events such as ‘R U OK? Day’:

<https://www.ruok.org.au/>

a national initiative to raise awareness about mental health wellbeing in Australia. This was also the case for awareness days specific to the Australian military community, such as Legacy Week, a week to support the veterans community.

The ECDP *Twitter* page targeted a different audience, including stakeholders such as other academics, funding bodies, and industry groups. Posts on the project *Twitter* page focused more on research dissemination by sharing project outputs, such as links to recent publications.

Reporting to stakeholders

Project organisers should “report back to stakeholders on ...performance, both those consulted and those with more general interests in the project” according to the IFC (2007, p. 12). Reporting on this project occurred through the project progress page on the website and via targeted media engagement.

Stakeholder consultation

The ICF (2007) recommended project organisers “plan out each consultation, consult inclusively, document the process and communicate follow up” (p. 12). Media engagement plans were created with the University of New England’s Faculty media officer, involving stakeholder identification and media engagement:

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/every-child-magazine/every-child-index/>

with certain events, for example, the 30th anniversary of when Australia ratified the United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which made it mandatory to listen to children’s voices in matters that affect them (Rogers & Boyd, 2020). This was particularly relevant to the ECDP because children and family narratives are often

expressed in the eBooks to be digitised and made interactive for the project, e.g. https://www.defence.gov.au/DCO/_Master/documents/Books/Anthonys-Story.pdf

Social media including *Facebook* and *Twitter* were used as a tool for encouraging stakeholder consultation. Firstly, social media networks were used to promote consultation opportunities built into the project design, specifically the steering committee volunteers. Meetings with the committee were promoted on the project's social media networks shortly after meetings, and at regular intervals through the project delivery. Social media effectively facilitated consultation by allowing regular promotion of participation opportunities, including an art, craft and a song verse writing competition. Social media also provided an accessible format for stakeholders to ask questions and seek information about the project. This was evidenced in one conversation on *Twitter*, where a stakeholder questioned whether findings would be made publicly available. A research team member was able to make a direct, timely and public response evident to other stakeholders on the platform.

Stakeholder engagement in project monitoring

Project organisers need to “involve directly affected stakeholders in monitoring project impacts ... and benefits” (ICF, 2007, p. 12). One media release aimed at leveraging more funding from potential donors focused on the potential benefits of the project for young children, their families, educators and ultimately, society:

(https://www.une.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/317391/ACE_Giving-Report_2020_web_01-v3.pdf pages 21-22)

Social media networks were used to enhance stakeholder engagement in project monitoring. *Facebook* and *Twitter* were used to promote academic publications and other published material about the project. As the project progressed, social media was a key dissemination method for reporting project outcomes and outputs. The oversight function available on *Facebook* and *Twitter* became more effective with a larger audience, which was why early project attention was focused on building awareness of, and engagement with, the website and social media accounts. As the project progressed these social media networks that had grown organically over the life of the project, assisted stakeholders in monitoring and providing feedback on impacts and benefits.

Management functions

The project aimed to “build and maintain sufficient capacity within the ... [project] to manage processes of stakeholder engagement, track commitments and report on progress” (ICF, 2007, p. 12). Social media analytics were collected every month. A research team member collated information including website visits and bounce rates, social media ‘likes’, shares and engagement, and compared this data to previous months. These analytics were reported at monthly research team meetings to provide accountability and monitoring of how relationships with key stakeholders and audiences were progressing. These analytics were also delivered to project funders during regular reporting periods. Regular reporting of analytics benefitted the project, not only in identifying new areas of opportunity, but also by allowing for early identification of issues. At one stage, the project website analytics suggested a significant surge in visitors to the

website. This surge took place after a month of increased traditional and social media activity, and without more careful attention, could have suggested these efforts were highly successful in drawing visitors to the site. In reality, increased website visits were the result of automated bot activity. While the increased media activity had increased visitors to the site, the ability to carefully assess the true effectiveness of the media was of benefit to the project team. It also enabled successful reporting back to project stakeholders.

Discussion

While technology is a powerful tool, its effectiveness is entirely related to how technology is applied (Sutherland, Alis & Khuttab, 2020). This study provides important findings for communications and stakeholder theory by demonstrating how dialogic theory can be adopted from its typical application in corporate environments, to enhance research project outcomes and support further funding applications. The combination of communications and stakeholder theories provided clear benefits to the project success, despite the challenges of engagement.

Dialogic communication is more than information dissemination. It focuses on creating an interactive dialogic loop between the organisation and the stakeholder. It involves useful, relevant, timely information of interest and being responsive to communication from stakeholders, even when that communication is not positive. This project demonstrated the five key components of dialogic theory: mutuality, commitment, empathy, risk and propinquity (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Taylor & Kent, 2014). The project did this through the development and maintenance of social media and web platforms, sharing of non-project related information, using platforms to encourage stakeholder input in the program and directly responding to stakeholder and audience questions and feedback.

In this study, dialogic communications theory combined well with stakeholder engagement theories to propose frameworks for effective engagement with stakeholders, to the overall benefit of the project. The most significant challenges of stakeholder engagement were associated with time and research team familiarity and skill level with these platforms.

Social media and web platforms are available at low or no cost, making them attractive to researchers on restricted budgets. Limited upfront costs can hide the time associated with setting up and maintaining the platforms. Indeed, the time spent in monitoring and maintaining the website and social media networks was considerable. It was an additional burden on research team members with already full academic workloads in a time of increasing overwork in universities worldwide (Sims, 2020). Ultimately, it was considered that the benefits of strategically engaging with stakeholders outweighed the time invested.

The benefits of engaging strategically with stakeholders included enhancing opportunities for future funding applications, increasing the skill set of research team members, building stakeholder agency and project involvement, and maintaining research motivation and enthusiasm. Stakeholder engagement opens opportunities to join with others, as funders

look kindly on applications which connect academic and industry partners. In this project, early efforts in stakeholder engagement were successful in developing relationships with ex-service organisations, which in turn enabled the submission of additional external grant funding. Stakeholder engagement was also effective in increasing the skill set of the research team by allowing focus on new activities such as media engagement, writing for social media, and the creation of visual materials. One unexpected benefit was how the research team were encouraged by the involvement of stakeholders, further reinforcing to them the need for the project and its timely completion. Further, website and social media platforms are effective for directing stakeholder enquiries and assessing stakeholder engagement (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013). Analytical tools built into *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *WordPress* allow for real-time monitoring of engagement; therefore, assessing and reporting was a simplified process.

Funded research opportunities are becoming increasingly competitive and funding bodies are making greater demands on researchers to demonstrate successful stakeholder relationships. Knowing that projects are increasingly assessed in line with stakeholder engagement, project success is defined according to how stakeholders consider the outcomes of the project (Davis, 2017). Therefore, it is critical for projects to engage early with stakeholders, understanding their desires and expectations for the project. These findings are highly relevant to researchers engaged in competitive research applications.

Need for further research

This project marks the beginning of a successful and effective relationship between a research design, targeted aims and objectives, stakeholders and ADF families, largely through the power of media engagement, online presence and social media. During a time where research funds are heavily restricted, the use of social media offers a fast, convenient and accessible platform at little to no cost. Further research into the ongoing impact of social media, particularly over a longer period, will provide an insight into the impact social media can have on academic research.

Conclusion

In this community, online education project, stakeholder engagement through the development of a website, media engagement, and the use of social media platforms have been key to ensuring the project deliverables are created organically. The research team are keen to ensure that the stakeholders can see their ideas reflected in the project because this is often used as a measurement of success by some communities. The research team found the use of these types of stakeholder engagement beneficial in many ways, including providing further opportunities for gathering stakeholder support and ideas. The use of frameworks of stakeholder engagement and the application of the dialogic communications theory broadened the team's reflection about the nature, usefulness and necessity of stakeholder engagement through these mediums.

It has also deepened their commitment to ensuring it continues throughout the life of the project, despite the challenges. This is a significant investment of time for the team, given

the increasing demands placed upon academics' time within universities (Connell, 2019; Sims, 2020). The research team believes the rewards this engagement affords will be worth the effort in this project, as well as in future projects the team undertakes in an increasingly competitive funding environment. Significantly, the lessons learned about working within a restricted budget and the amount of time needed to effectively engage in online environments is relevant for other researchers as they plan and implement their projects.

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